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29 September 1966

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Copy No. 23

## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

### CHINESE COMMUNIST FORCES IN NORTH VIETNAM

NGA Review Complete

### DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

NSA review completed

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
29 September 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Chinese Communist Forces in North Vietnam

Summary

There has been no significant change in the Chinese Communist military forces in North Vietnam during the past three months. The radio net supporting them has remained relatively stable, with slightly over 100 terminals active on a regular basis.

The communications structure continues to give evidence of at least seven major Chinese units in North Vietnam, all of them probably of division size. One is known to be an air force antiaircraft artillery (AAA) division. Another is a railway engineer division. The other five are thought to be an army AAA division and four special engineer divisions (see map on reverse of page).

These construction units are being supported by service units believed to be of regimental size, drawn from the adjacent regions of southern China. In all, there is an estimated total of 25,000 to 45,000 Chinese support troops in North Vietnam.

Photographic analysis shows continuing construction in each of the areas where communications activity has pointed to the presence of major Chinese engineer units. The rail line between the border and Kep may have been converted for use by both standard and meter-gauge rolling stock by adding a third rail. The new standard-gauge line to the Thai Nguyen iron and steel complex from Kep is nearing completion.

NOTE: This memorandum was produced by CIA. Aside from the normal substantive exchange with other agencies at the working level this paper has not been coordinated outside CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of Research and Reports.

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Construction is continuing at two major airfields in northern North Vietnam. Photographic analysis of the activities at one of them, the field at Yen Bai, clearly identifies it as a Chinese project. Moreover, [redacted] support a Chinese presence at Yen Bai since August 1965. [redacted]

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The other airfield possibly under construction by the Chinese is located at Son Tay (previously referred to as Song Dong), about 20 miles west of Hanoi. [redacted]

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[redacted] There is no firm evidence of Chinese involvement, but the scope of the project, the rapid rate of construction, and the large amount of construction equipment indicate an effort that might strain the capability of the Vietnamese.

[redacted] Chinese engineers are constructing coastal defense sites on Cat Ba Island near Haiphong. His statements have been supported by analysis of photographs of the northeast coastal area. Chinese units may also be participating in road construction and improvement in the North Vietnam - South China border area.

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All the evidence continues to point to a logistic support role for the Chinese forces in North Vietnam. As the construction projects are completed the Chinese engineering-type units may return to China. There is some evidence that a few of the smaller units already have gone.

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[redacted] intercepted messages indicate a high-level command in the Sino-DRV border region, but thus far it has not exercised any observable control over the radio net serving Chinese logistic units in North Vietnam. This communications arrangement could furnish the framework for the deployment of a considerably greater number of Chinese units into Vietnam.

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### Recent Developments

1. The organization and composition of Chinese Forces in North Vietnam (CFNVN) has remained essentially unchanged during the past three months. Some minor realignments, the appearance of new entities, and the deactivation of some communications links have been observed, but these changes have not significantly affected either the strength or the mission of the Chinese units. The number of radio terminals serving them has fluctuated but the total remains about the same.

2. There have been several new developments, however.

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3. The authority believed to be the headquarters of Chinese forces in North Vietnam was referred to in communications

Message routing instructions suggest that this authority is located in Yunnan Province adjacent to northwest North Vietnam.

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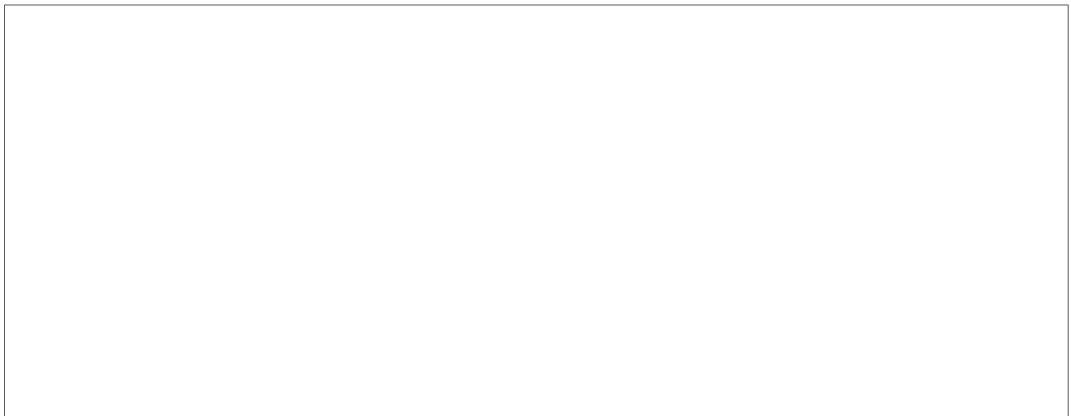
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These messages contained references to DRV Naval Group 125, located in the Hon Gai area. Intercepted North Vietnamese communications indicate that North Vietnamese coastal freighters that make up Group 125 have in the past been used to escort DRV gunboats to South China for maintenance. However, the identification of Chinese authorities in communications associated with Group 125 reflects at least a closer Sino/DRV naval coordination, and may pre-  
sage an expansion of joint naval activities.



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This suggests that if an element of a Chinese infantry division has deployed into North Vietnam, it is probably only a very small contingent, possibly a support element such as an antiaircraft artillery or engineer unit.

9. The Chinese Army AAA division at Yen Bai has been tentatively identified as a result of a communications compromise when the controller of a Chinese operational AAA voice broadcast in the Yen Bai area referred to his station both as the "67th Air Defense Unit" and the "headquarters." Air warning traffic was subsequently transmitted to at least four subordinate stations.

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It seems likely, therefore, that the unit at Yen Bai is, in fact, the 67th AAA Division.

10. On 9 September tenuous references to another AAA division were noted

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with the Chinese units located in the Yen Bai area. This AAA unit has been identified as the previously unobserved Chinese Air Force 106th AAA Division. The messages may presage either a rotation or augmentation of AAA units in the Yen Bai area.

#### Return of Some Units to China

11. Three and possibly four units have dropped out of communications in the Chinese radio network in North Vietnam during the past several months,

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25X1 suggesting they have returned to China. One of these, which may have been a special construction unit [ ] in the Lao Cai area of northwest North Vietnam, appears to have had a construction function and may have been engaged in road improvements.

12. A possible counterpart of this unit in northeast North Vietnam may also have withdrawn. This organization [ ] has recently terminated its communications with several higher authorities, but still appears as the control of at least one subordinate radio group.

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13. Another element on the northeast coast, which may be a maritime logistics unit [ ] was last observed in communications on 31 May. This radio station had been associated with a Chinese landing craft [ ]

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25X1 14. The control station of another maritime logistics unit, [ ] has not been heard in communications since 13 September. This authority controlled 20-25 Chinese coastal craft in the Hon Gai area. These boats may have been supporting Chinese engineer units constructing coastal defenses on the offshore islands near Hon Gai, including Cat Ba. Their withdrawal may indicate that the projects are nearing completion.

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15. Communications serving other major Chinese units in North Vietnam have shown little change during the period. More precise RDF results have located the special engineer division [ ] in the Tuyen Quang area rather than at Son Tay. Further minor changes in the locations of some of these units can be expected as more and better RDF data become available.

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16. We continue to believe that there are at least seven divisional-level Chinese units in North Vietnam. However, our past strength estimate of 30,000 to 47,000 troops has been revised downward to a range of 25,000 to 45,000 troops on the basis of

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**NORTH VIETNAM**  
**SUSPECT CHINESE ENGINEER PROJECTS**

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newly obtained organizational data for Chinese ground force units.

Chinese Construction Activity in North Vietnam (See Map)

17. The construction activity at Yen Bai was firmly identified as airfield construction by low-level photography [redacted] The photography shows that grading and leveling have enlarged the airfield [redacted]

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[redacted] This number is more than would be required for support of airfield construction alone and may point to development of a major support base.

18. There is new evidence that the airfield project at Yen Bai is being built by the Chinese. Two North Vietnamese soldiers, captured in South Vietnam at different times and different places in 1966, reported the arrival of Chinese AAA troops at Yen Bai in August 1965. This information agrees closely with conclusions based on intercepted Chinese military communications which indicate that an unidentified army AAA division [redacted] moved into this area at about this time. The unit was subsequently replaced by the unit believed to be the 67th AAA Division [redacted] in February 1966.

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19. Chinese AAA troops were apparently deployed to Yen Bai for the specific purpose of protecting the airfield project [redacted] [redacted] photography has revealed 50 AA sites (20 of which were occupied) and 56 automatic weapons sites surrounding the airfield construction and support base. This is approximately the number of sites required to emplace the guns of a Chinese army AAA division.

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20. There are no [redacted] reports to support indications of a Chinese presence at Son Tay, where another major airfield is under construction. Moreover, it has been determined that the Chinese engineer unit [redacted] previously thought

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[redacted]

to be at Son Tay is in fact located in the Tuyen Quang area. The general pattern of construction and the number and types of equipment seen at Son Tay, however, are reminiscent of Yen Bai. Moreover, the rate of construction and engineering skill displayed would seem to strain North Vietnamese capabilities. [redacted]

[redacted]

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22. Most of the reported construction projects have been confirmed by photographic analysis, and the buildings reportedly housing the Chinese engineers do have definite military characteristics. [redacted]

[redacted]

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23. A review of photography has revealed a sharp increase in military activity on Cat Ba Island [redacted]

[redacted] This includes several areas of military activity consisting of camouflaged buildings and tents, local defensive positions, building materials and equipment, and at least two new coastal defense sites. These sites have four revetted positions and tunnel entrances, and approach roads. They appear similar to coastal defense sites in South China and are more permanent than those seen south of Hanoi.

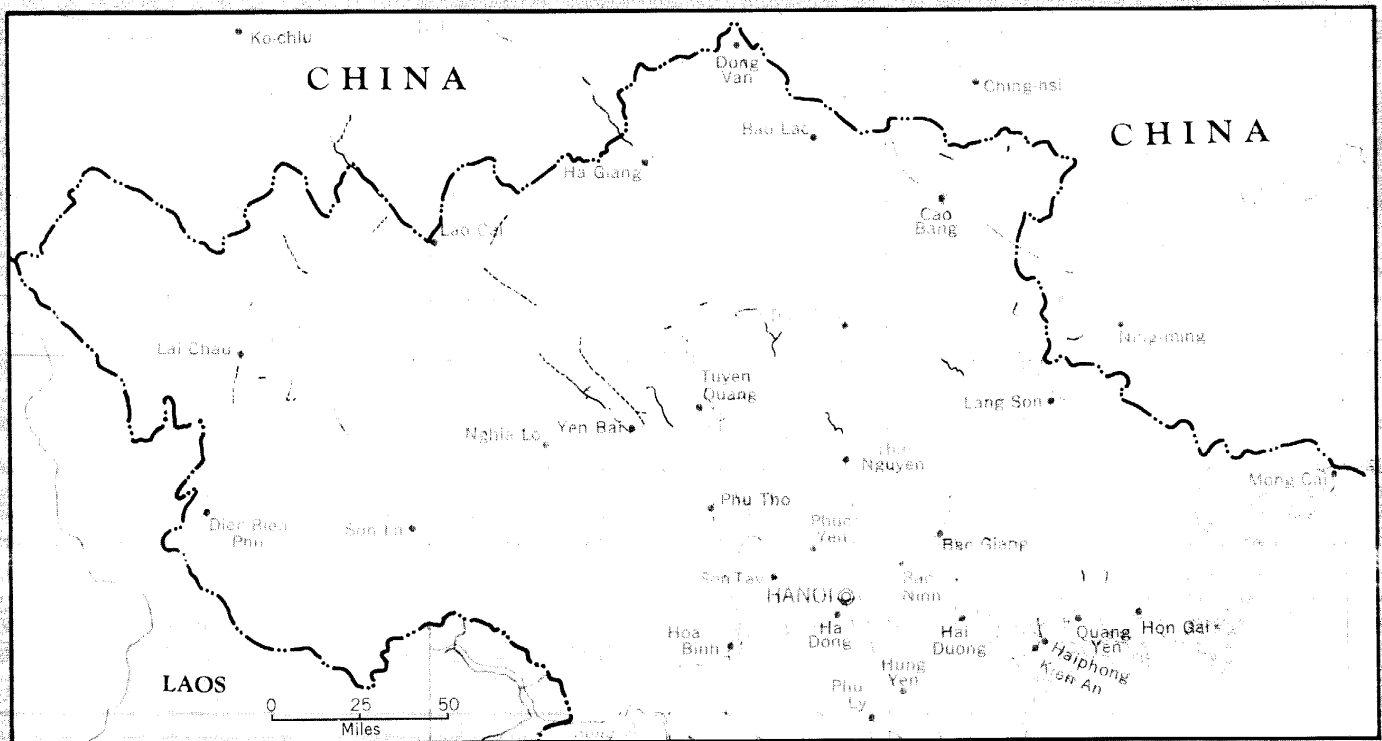
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24. The Chinese engineer regiment reported at Cat Ba is probably one of the several subordinates [redacted] which deployed to the Hon Gai/Tien Yen area in June 1965. Initially, the organization [redacted] was thought to have a coastal

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# NORTH VIETNAM-SOUTH CHINA BORDER AREA ROAD CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY



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[REDACTED]

defense mission. However, this more recent information indicates that it is a special engineer division working on coastal defense construction projects.

25. The work of the 2nd Railway Engineer Division at Kep is continuing. A third rail may have been added to the Hanoi-Pinghsiang line between Dong Dang and Kep. Photography [REDACTED] showed standard-gauge rolling stock near Kep. Segments of the line with the third rail have been observed between Kep and Pinghsiang [REDACTED]

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26. Work is also continuing on the standard-gauge line between Kep and the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel complex, a major Chinese aid project. Most of the major bridges and tunnels have been completed on this line. This will increase the load capacity and flexibility of North Vietnam's major rail link with South China and speed up shipments to the Vietnamese. If the third rail is eventually extended to Hanoi, Vietnam-bound freight could be shipped directly to Hanoi without transloading.

27. Chinese construction units may also have assisted in road construction and improvement projects near the Sino/DRV border. A recent photographic study of the status of roads in this area reveals a total of some 500 miles of road construction and improvement on the North Vietnam side of the border. Most of this work [REDACTED] has involved improvements in existing roads and the establishment of connecting links. Two new roads are under construction parallel to the Red River between Yen Bai and Lao Cai. They will provide better Chinese access to the Yen Bai area. In addition, the North Vietnam-South China road network has been joined at several more points along the border. (See Map)

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#### Prospects

28. As the Chinese construction projects in North Vietnam are completed, some changes are likely in the role and composition of the Chinese forces there. The number of support buildings constructed at Yen Bai may indicate that this area is planned

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as a forward Chinese logistical base. [REDACTED]

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29. The recent evidence of increased Chinese naval association with North Vietnam in communications may indicate a trend toward closer operational cooperation. This could take the form of joint coastal and offshore defense procedures in the northern Tonkin Gulf, similar to those instituted in the field of air defense. It may also signal an expansion of naval support to North Vietnam, in the form of more patrol boats or use of Chinese naval combat units in northern DRV waters.

30. As for the future of the Chinese military presence in North Vietnam, the first indication of change may come if and when the Chinese engineer units start withdrawing following the completion of their tasks. If the experience of the past year is a reliable guide, any major shift in the Chinese role in North Vietnam should then be reflected in intercepted communications. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Before the Chinese make any major move in this direction, however, they will probably build up their ground force strength on their side of the border. As yet, there is no indication that any such augmentation has occurred.

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29 September 1966

Talking Paper on "Chinese Communist Forces in North Vietnam"

1. This is the fifth memorandum published on this subject. Secretary of Defense McNamara has expressed a desire for periodic reviews of this situation.

2. Its main conclusions:

a. The role and status of the Chinese Communist military forces in North Vietnam have not changed substantially during the past three months. There are 25,000 to 45,000 Chinese support troops in North Vietnam.

b. The communications structure continues to give evidence of at least seven major Chinese units in North Vietnam.

c. Photographic analysis shows continuing construction activity in each of the areas where communications activity has pointed to the presence of major Chinese engineer units.

3. Recommend routine dissemination.